

Wilson's Creek National Battlefield

Teacher's Guide for Civil War Museum

20 - 30 minutes

School groups are at liberty to tour the Civil War Museum located at Wilson's Creek Battlefield Park but, because a visit to the museum is a self-guided experience, it may better serve the instructional needs of the group if a teacher leads the group through the museum's various exhibits. This guide is intended to assist teachers in leading groups through the museum.

Primary Interpretive Theme:

The Battle of Wilson's Creek resulted in part from the fact that Missouri was a border state, a western or Trans-Mississippi state, and a slave state as well. Beyond this, Missouri was also the site of internal conflict as certain social, economic, ethnic and political differences boiled up between citizens.

The artifacts in the Park's Civil War Museum provide an opportunity not only to relate the specific Battle of Wilson's Creek but also to tell the larger story of the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi Theater. These stories illustrate how and why the fighting here in the west was much more personal, divisive and fierce than it was back East.

Introduction to the Museum:

The museum's collection consists of thousands of artifacts from the Trans-Mississippi Civil War. This collection is organized two ways. Artifacts are clustered around various battles that occurred in the Western theatre and, secondly, they're organized by army branch, with specific collections relevant to the artillery, the cavalry, the infantry, and the medical service.

Stops within the Museum:

Stop One:

Stop in front of the <u>John Brown case</u>. Explain the Planter's House Meeting and results which sent Missouri on her way to war, with the state split into two factions. Explain that Missouri was a slave state having entered the Union in 1821 as a result of the Missouri Compromise of 1820. Point out that Missourians included Union supporters who were slave owners. John Ray, local farmer and postmaster for Wilson's Creek Township serves as an example. By contrast, there were those who supported secession from the Union, but held no slaves.

Afterall, most people who lived in Missouri and Kansas in the 1850s and '60s originally came from somewhere else. This included places like Georgia, Alabama, or Mississippi and people from the old cotton south naturally brought their own social values and political views with them. But, such was also the case with settlers from New England.

Stop Two:

Move over to the <u>Wilson's Creek case</u> explaining the role of General Lyon and his Federal troops and Generals Price and McCullough and their Missouri State Guard and Confederate Troops. (Mention the first skirmish at Dug Springs near Clever.) Point out some of the different bullets, difference in weapons (rifled, mini balls, Union), different uniforms, etc. Talk about the Medal of Honor and the fact that five were earned at Wilson's Creek (two of which are on display).

Stop Three:

Stop in front of 1st National flag of the Confederacy, the "Stars and Bars," and explain the importance of the Cherokee flag. Explain that members of various Indian tribes were also split. (While some Cherokees thought they would fare better under the Confederacy, "Pin" Cherokees were loyal to the Union). At the battle of Newtonia, Indians fought each other. General Stand Waite was the only Cherokee to attain the rank of Maj. Gen. in the Confederate Army and, was the last Confederate commander to surrender, doing so two months after Appamadox, on June 23, 1865.

Stop Four:

Have students sit in front of the <u>Medical Case</u>. Discuss women's roles in the CW (ex. nurses, spies, soldiers, seamstresses, fund raisers, and preservers of the home and farm.). Then talk about Civil War medicine including disease, amputations, anesthetics, causes of death, the lack of knowledge regarding sanitation and germs, the beginning of modern medicine.

The artifacts in this case help tell the story of how medicine was practiced throughout the war, not just in the Trans-Mississippi.

Stop Five:

Point out the Museum's <u>Navy</u> exhibits. Explain that any collection of U.S. or C.S. Navy artifacts specific to the Trans-Mississippi would naturally emphasize the role of the "freshwater" or "river" navy, not the "saltwater" or sea-born U.S. Navy blockading southern seaports, for example.

Stop Six:

Most of the remaining display cases in the museum contain examples of <u>weapons</u> unique to the various branches of the Army, namely the cavalry, artillery, and infantry.

This concludes the group's tour of the museum gallery. Restrooms are available off the exit hallway and drinking water is available in the lobby.

"The Civil War Museum at Wilson's Creek"

An essay by Park Historian Connie Langum

The Museum's primary significance. The Battle of Wilson's Creek should be our first area of significance. It is the 2nd battle of the Civil War and was a fierce, six-hour contest. Five men received the Medal of Honor for their bravery at Wilson's Creek, a high number considering the number of men involved. But, the story doesn't end there. We also have the opportunity to tell the story of the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi Theater. It is important to remember that the Civil War was fought differently out here as opposed to the large, set-piece campaigns more typical to the East. Out here, it was much more personal, divisive and fierce, especially in Missouri and Kansas.

What does the Museum represent to visitors? Visitors may care about the museum because it is the final piece of a puzzle, so to speak. Visitors certainly have access to the battlefield itself. They may also have limited access to books and written documents held by the Park's library. Finally, however, there are the physical artifacts on display both in the museum and in the visitor's center. Seeing actual items used during the battle brings the whole story home, and hopefully gives the visitor a more vivid picture of the human struggle that took place here and elsewhere in the Trans-Mississippi.

The Museum's secondary significance. The museum does not just include artifacts of the Wilson's Creek fight. Rather, the collection covers the larger Trans-Mississippi Theater of the Civil War. Most of the press coverage at the time, as well as post-war histories were devoted to the Eastern Theater but lots of action took place west of the Mississippi River. Missouri ranks third in the number of battles fought within her borders, behind Virginia and Tennessee, respectively. The Trans-Mississippi story is vastly different from the more familiar story of the Civil War in the East.

What else does the Museum represent to visitors? For visitors from Midwestern states, the engagements featured in the museum's collection represent battles that happened in their backyard. Hopefully they will come to realize the significant role Missouri and other Midwestern states played during the War and why both sides fought so hard to control both state and region. These are places visitors have most likely been to or heard of. Finally, the story of the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi is not on display anywhere else in the National Park Service to the extent that it is here at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield.